

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**UNA-UK ADDRESS ON
“SECURING THE COMMON GOOD:
THE UNITED NATIONS
AND THE EXPANDING GLOBAL AGENDA”
London, 13 June 2008**

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be back in London and to join so many distinguished friends of the United Nations in this magnificent hall.

Lord Hannay, let me thank you for your generous introduction. You began it by alluding to my baptism by fire. I know what you mean.

The 18 months I have held office have been even more eventful than usual for the UN. During this time, I have learned why the first UN Secretary-General dubbed this the most impossible job on earth, why so many have quoted him since, and why yet others have described it as one with limited influence and unlimited responsibility.

I quickly discovered these doomsayers were right – but also completely wrong. The office of Secretary-General does have few powers, but that is more than made up for by an Organization with many friends.

These friends – including all of you – exemplify the real power of my position: the ability to call on some of the most extraordinary individuals in public service or private enterprise to support the UN’s work.

Nowhere is this more true than in the United Kingdom, a country with a long and distinguished history of engagement with our Organization and its mission. From debt relief to climate change, human rights to UN reform, the people and Government of the United Kingdom have proved reliable advocates for the most pressing issues on the UN’s agenda.

For more than six decades, UNA-UK has helped cultivate this support. Through outreach, volunteer efforts, educational initiatives, conferences and seminars, your members have built a grassroots support base for the UN. You have explained the UN to the UK while helping to convey the concerns of British citizens to the UN.

So I am delighted for this opportunity to speak to all of you today about the major issues on our agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Owing to the alignment of a number of developments, we have a unique opportunity this year to enhance the central role of the United Nations in world affairs.

We must deliver results for a more prosperous and healthy world. Passing the midpoint to the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals, we face a development emergency. Millions of people are still trapped in structural poverty and go hungry every day. In sub-Saharan Africa, despite pockets of progress, not a single country is on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

We must deliver results for a more secure world. This year will put us to new tests in peacekeeping, bringing it to an unprecedented scale, complexity and risk level. Success depends first and foremost on how Member States match the mandates they have set with political support and actual contributions -- troops, police, vital capabilities and finance.

We must deliver results for a more just world. A global awareness campaign is already underway to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We must uphold the responsibility to protect, and ensure the Human Rights Council lives up to the high expectations of the international community.

At the same time, the UN must work overall to address the global threats which spare no one in today's world. They require us to advance the global common good by securing global public goods – in the areas of climate change, global health, counter-terrorism and disarmament. The United Nations is uniquely placed to lead this effort – this is my central message to you today.

I am convinced that if we do not collaborate on these four global challenges now, they will escalate to global threats of irreversible proportions in the future. These issues differ qualitatively from all other matters of global concern because: they endanger *all* countries—rich and poor—and *all* people; they cross borders and are highly contagious; and they can only be resolved with action by all nations and all peoples.

For friends of the United Nations, the need for collective action represents the silver lining to some very dark clouds: today's complex and global challenges represent exactly the environment in which our United Nations should thrive -- because no country can resolve these problems on its own. They signal a world where the United Nations can, and must, grow and take on new roles, develop and deliver on new fronts.

And that is exactly what our Organization is doing. Take climate change, which I personally consider the defining challenge of our age.

Last December, in the best tradition of the Royal Geographic Society, I journeyed to Antarctica. What I found was a place that would probably be unrecognizable to the likes of Robert Scott or Ernest Shackleton.

I saw a continent on the verge of a catastrophe that could affect the entire world. The glaciers on King George Island have shrunk by 10 per cent. Some in Admiralty Bay have retreated by 25 kilometres.

The tragedy of Antarctica is being repeated, a million times over, in every part of our world. We're facing extended droughts, unprecedented cyclones and other effects that are wreaking havoc across the planet. The bottom line is that our climate is changing fast, and the world has been too slow in response.

Since taking over as Secretary-General, I have made it my priority to beat the drum on this impending crisis. I am determined to get the UN and our Member States to step up action to meet this immense challenge.

My efforts received an unexpected boost with the award of last year's Nobel Peace Prize to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The Panel's research established that climate change was not only occurring, but accelerating, and that man-made emissions were largely responsible. Also last year, the UN-sponsored climate talks in Bali produced an agreement by all countries to launch negotiations on a new international climate change agreement by the end of 2009 and a roadmap for how to get there.

These welcome developments have placed the UN squarely at the forefront of the climate change response. My colleagues and I are determined to capitalize on the momentum generated and push for decisive action supported by all our Member States.

Indeed, as I tell world leaders, whatever the costs of tackling climate change – and they are not as much as you might think – the cost of inaction is far, far greater.

In that sense, acting now is not only the right thing to do, it is also the cheaper alternative.

Global health is another pressing challenge which we are poised to meet.

Migration and rapid urbanization have changed the way we way we look at global health. Diseases and pandemics spread across borders much faster than ever before. If they are not controlled effectively, the impact will be devastating. The neglected diseases of the world's poor are one example. So-called "neglected tropical diseases" that affect millions beyond tropical regions are another.

The silver lining to this dark cloud is that the world has the ability to treat and control many of these diseases. And we also have the know-how to build health systems that serve all.

That is why the United Nations is pushing hard for sustainable action to cut maternal and child mortality, to combat HIV/AIDS, to defeat malaria, and to wipe out tuberculosis and other diseases. We are also working to build functioning and affordable health systems, starting with increased support to the people who staff them.

But these efforts are hindered by the fragmented nature of the global health landscape. That is also why the welcome rise in new actors and resources will not amount to much unless we ensure coherent and decisive action.

The United Nations is already working on this front, as a convener and advocate for greater coordination and accountability among health actors. A few weeks ago, I called a meeting of United Nations and non-UN leaders in the health sphere to discuss top global health priorities and what we can do about them. I told them then, and I say to you now: too many lives hang in the balance for us to wait. This is the time to be decisive and bold.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Terrorism can affect anyone, anywhere, at any time -- as you know too well, here in the United Kingdom, and we in the United Nations know in our missions around the world.

In 2006 the UN General Assembly adopted the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. This was a milestone – the first time that all 192 Member States came together to formulate a comprehensive, collective, and internationally approved plan to counter terrorism.

It was also the first time all Member States agreed that certain conditions can be conducive to the spread of terrorism and that our counter-terrorism efforts must target these conditions. The adoption of this landmark Strategy demonstrated, yet again, the UN's role in addressing key global challenges.

The Organization is now working closely with Member States to apply the measures outlined in the Strategy. Within the UN system itself, departments, programmes, funds and agencies have been taking action in a number of areas, in both their individual capacities as well as through joint efforts guided by the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force. But we also look to our Member States to rise to the occasion, and to follow-through on this ambitious Strategy.

In the same way, I look to Member States to step up to the challenge of disarmament and non-proliferation.

Weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, are inherently indiscriminate. They make no distinction between citizen and soldier, men and women, the old and the young, plant and animal—indeed, no distinction between all living things. They wreak wholesale havoc, not just spatially but also temporally, lingering into the future to rob new generations of life, security and prosperity. And even when they are not used, these weapons remain a threat. There is always a risk that they can cause accidents, or fall into the wrong hands, with deadly consequences.

There is now near universal recognition of the risks inherent in the very existence of weapons of mass destruction. There is also widespread understanding of the dangers accompanying unconstrained competition in conventional weaponry. In fact, in deliberations at the United Nations, the vast majority of States continue to cite *zero* as the most desirable

minimum number of nuclear weapons. They also accept that verified and irreversible disarmament remains the safest, most reliable way to protect against the use of weapons of mass destruction.

Building on these points of agreement, any realistic approach to security should involve the simultaneous pursuit of two essential goals: the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction—namely, nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons—and the limitation of other types of weapons to legitimate defensive purposes.

I intend to work with Member States in pursuit of these ideals. My own experiences in Korea taught me that there is simply no other way to safeguard our collective security, and ensure a peaceful world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The four challenges I have just outlined today are truly global. They affect all and they require attention by all.

I have identified the issues, but I have not proposed solutions. These require more than a 20 minute-monologue from a Secretary-General, or, for that matter, even the most profound thinking at the local or national level. They require collective thinking and global approaches. In short, they require the United Nations. Not just the organization, but also the ideal – all people working together for the collective good.

That is my challenge to you today. As supporters of the United Nations, as decision makers, as activists and as concerned citizens, you can make crucial contributions. The issues are already before us. But solutions will come through joint and unprecedented effort. Together, we can tackle the looming challenges and make our world healthier and safer for all people.

Thank you very much.